

Malcolm Buckley to leave 'before overstaying his welcome'

Council leader steps down from position

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THE district's top councillor has sensationally stepped down, claiming he did not want to overstay his welcome.

Cllr Malcolm Buckley, 57, who has been leader of Basildon District Council for seven years, made the announcement on Monday night, saying the position had become wearing.

He said the role was also affecting the amount of time he could spend working for his own property business.

Cllr Buckley, who represents Wickford Castledon Ward, will officially quit his leadership at the end of May when the Conservatives will elect a new figurehead, but will continue to serve as a councillor.

He said: "I think the time has come for somebody else to take over. There are no elections this year and it seems the right time to go.

"I could have stayed on for another four years but that would have meant eleven years in the job and I think, when you look at it, both Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair overstayed their welcome and I didn't want to do something similar."

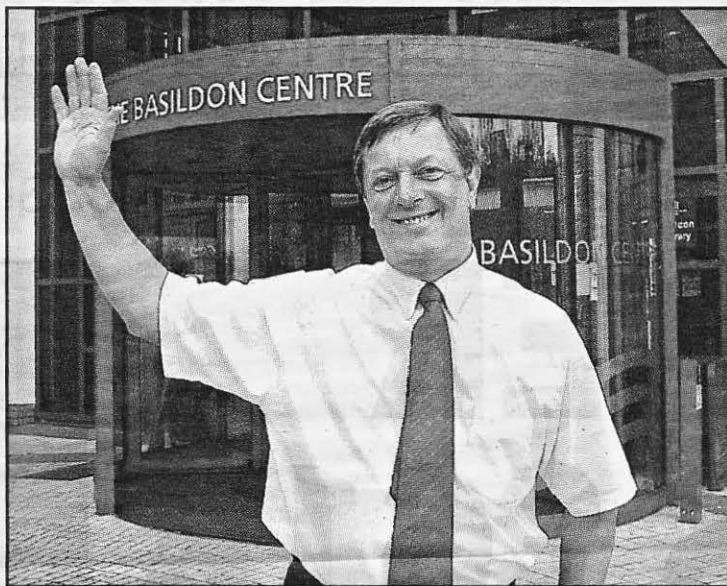
Cllr Buckley leaves as the council's longest ever serving leader.

Having joined the council back in 1988 he lists one of his biggest successes as raising the profile of Basildon, improving efficiency and starting efforts to regenerate Wickford.

However, his most high-profile role has been as the council's spokesman on the controversial issue of the illegal Dale Farm traveller site in Billericay.

He said: "It's the one thing people will stop me on the street and ask me about. They say 'When are the travellers going?' and unfortunately, up to now, I haven't been able to give them an answer, but I can tell them it is a case of when, not if.

"I have had emails from all over the world on the subject but doing what I have done and trying to uphold the planning law is something I do not



HIGHLIGHTS: Clockwise from above, Cllr Buckley waves goodbye to the council; he helps switch the Christmas lights on in Wickford; and joins the campaign to keep Wickford North green.

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regret and I don't think I would have done anything differently.

"It has certainly been a very frustrating process and I have become very annoyed with the legal process, it seems to take years to get anything done."

In 1996 he became the sole Tory in the council chamber, having narrowly defended his then Wickford

South seat, beating the Liberal Democrats by just 99 votes.

But four years later the Tories stormed back and in 2002 Cllr Buckley took over as leader.

Offering some pearls of wisdom to his successor, he said: "Be strong, robust and be prepared to challenge the advice you receive.

"And make sure the decisions you make are fair to the taxpayers who, at the end of the day, fund everything that this organisation does."

Current deputy leader Cllr Tony Ball refused to be drawn on speculation he would fill Cllr Buckley's shoes.

But he added: "Cllr Buckley has done an absolutely fantastic job."